



Promoting Physical Activity for People With Arthritis

Public Health Problem

Arthritis or chronic joint symptoms affect almost 70 million Americans—nearly one of every three adults, making it among the most common health problems in the United States. Arthritis is the most frequent cause of disability in America; more than 7 million citizens are limited in some way because of arthritis. Arthritis affects one of every three adults in Georgia, or approximately 1.8 million people; of these 1.8 million people with arthritis, 34% report that they engage in less physical activity than the general population.

Evidence That Prevention Works

A growing number of reports suggest that exercise has positive health benefits for people with arthritis. CDC's Arthritis Program is supporting research to examine the role of physical activity in lessening the effects of arthritis. The Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health brings together state-of-the-art research on the benefits of physical activity. According to the report, "Physical activity is essential for maintaining the health of joints and appears to be beneficial for controlling symptoms of osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis."

Program Example

The Georgia Division of Public Health piloted a physical activity program for people with arthritis in Georgia's West Central Health District. Three counties, representing urban, small-town, and rural populations, participated. Program leaders include representatives of the Georgia Division of Public Health, the Arthritis Foundation, and the Area Agency on Aging. Teams of 8 to 10 people with arthritis participated in 20 weeks of physical activity such as walking, gardening, swimming, and ballroom dancing. Team captains held group activities for their teams and provided educational materials and encouragement via telephone calls. Participants kept logs of their physical activity each week. This project has served as a catalyst for social change in the area. Local residents who recognized the need for a safe place to engage in physical activity have formed a coalition to advocate for such a place from the Webster County Board of Commissioners.

Implications

This program will provide information on how to implement community-based physical activity programs in urban, small-town, and rural settings. This information will help Georgia expand its program and will help other states increase physical activity levels among their residents. Using preliminary evaluation data, the Georgia Division of Public Health has identified gaps in the program. The revised program, to be conducted in 2003, will include an educational component, the Arthritis Self-Help Course, and will rely on partners to sponsor classes, recruit participants, and provide staff to serve as program coordinators and team captains. The second pilot will be conducted in metropolitan Atlanta and southwest Georgia.

Contact Information

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